

Kowhai Programme

Support for patients, families & carers

Grief: Learning about loss Grief is the normal process of reacting to a loss

Losses experienced and the impact of loss through the illness:

Physical:

- Limitations:
 - Mobility (can't walk far, need a frame or wheelchair)
 - Driving
 - Roles (work (and therefore financial loss), gardening, hobbies, sports, caring for others)
- Changes with disease progression/symptoms
- Changes to your intimacy/sexual relationships
- Side effects of medications (sleeping more or less, constipation, nausea)
- Side effects of treatments (chemotherapy, radiotherapy)
- Accommodation (having to move to long term care)
- Self destructive behaviours (lashing out at others, overuse of alcohol, using drugs, isolating yourself, taking to your bed)

Spiritual:

- Losses or reconnection to sources of strength such as:
 - Connection with your faith or culture (being able to go to church going to the Marae)
 - Connection with nature (being able to go outdoors/to important places)
 - Connection to meaningful activities (such as your hobbies/sports)
 - Connection to meaningful people (such as your family/friends)
- Hope
- Meaning (what am I leaving?)

Family/Whānau:

- Relationships (with our partners, children, friends)
- Planning/participating at important family events (weddings, birthdays, anniversaries)
- Change of role within the family (partner to care-giver, inability to do what you did within your family)

Mind:

- Frustration/anger (around changes in the body, limitations, symptoms)
- Anxiety (what's next)
- Waiting (for appointments, treatments, outcomes of results)
- Sadness
- Feelings of guilt/being a burden

Losses experienced and impact of loss after death:

Physical:

- Changes to responsibilities/roles (now having to be the bill payer, cook)
- Physical reminders of the person who has gone triggering emotions
- Shift of accommodation (moving out of the home you had shared)
- Finding other ways of doing what you used to do
- Changes to intimacy/being alone
- Changes to sleep patterns (sleeping more/sleeping less)
- Changes to appetite (eating more/eating less)
- Changes to participation of usual activities (isolating self)
- Self destructive behaviours (lashing out at others, overuse of alcohol, using drugs, isolating yourself, taking to your bed)

Spiritual:

- Feeling angry at God, having a crisis of your faith
- Loss of access to the things that normally give you strength/or a loss of enjoyment of these things
- Seeking out connection

Family/Whānau

- Seeking or rejecting connection with family/friends
- Feeling overwhelmed or underwhelmed by the support of family/friends
- Dealing with other peoples views on 'how you should....' or 'what is right for you...'

Mind:

- Feeling cheated 'why us?'
- Emotional impact:
- Exhausted
- Decreased concentration, memory loss
- Sadness, tearfulness
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Ruminating (going over and over events, 'why did I....' 'why didn't I....' 'what if....')
- The first significant events (birthdays, anniversaries the date of death)
- Not wanting to be here either, wanting to swap places

While experiencing these losses and the impact of these losses, how can I cope?

Physical:

- Enjoy the things that I can still do
- Putting structure to my day
- Pacing myself with each task (not over doing it)
- Set yourself achievable goals
- Being open and honest with your healthcare team about any problems – if they don't know they can't help

Spiritual:

- Connecting with your faith/prayer
- Connecting with your family
- Connecting with things that nurture you (nature, hobbies, people, sports, music)
- Connecting with yourself (write a biography)

Family/Whānau:

- Allowing or asking for help
- Spending time on your own
- Telling important people what you need to, what you want, share your experience
- Set limits to visitors/phone calls

Mind:

- Adjusting expectations (on yourself and on others)
- Distraction
- Look for things to look forward to, no matter how small

If you experience any of the below, this is when you need to seek help:

- When you can no longer carry out the ordinary tasks of everyday life
- You experience suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself
- You are reliant on alcohol or other drugs to get you through the day
- Withdrawing from people you love
- If you are worried about yourself

Seek help from a professional person e.g. your GP, contact the Hospice for bereavement support. Tell someone who can listen and get help for you. Accept that you cannot do this alone.

Remember: Human beings need each other and it is okay to ask for help

Each person grieves in their own way; there is no right or wrong way to grieve; only your way is the right way for you.

